



The Sixty-third Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art

2,514th Concert

Jiri Barta, *violoncellist*

5 December 2004

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that concerts now begin at 6:30 pm.
Late entry or reentry after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

2,514th Concert

5 December 2004, 6:30 pm

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major for Violoncello Solo, BWV 1010 (c. 1720)

Prélude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Bourée I, II

Gigue

Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967)

Sonata for Violoncello Solo, Op. 8 (1915)

Allegro maestoso ma appassionato

Adagio

Allegro molto vivace

Intermission

Bach

Suite No. 5 in C Minor, BWV 1008 (c. 1720)

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavotte I—Gavotte II—Gavotte I

Gigue

The Musician

Cellist Jiri Barta is one of the Czech Republic's most distinguished and highly acclaimed musicians. He studied with three great cellists of the twentieth century, Josef Chuchro and Michael Skampa in Prague and Boris Pergamenchikov in Cologne, and shortly thereafter he came to international attention as the winner of several awards, including the prestigious Rostropovich-Hammer Award at the 1991 Los Angeles Competition. Barta has performed concertos with the Czech Philharmonic, the Berlin Symphony, and the Prague Symphony, and has appeared in recital at London's Wigmore Hall, the Edinburgh Festival, and major concert venues in Paris, Tokyo, and Prague. The Czech recording company Supraphon has recorded Barta's performance of the two concertos of Dmitri Shostakovich with the Czech Philharmonic, conducted by Shostakovich's son, Maxim. Barta has also recorded the complete cello suites of Bach, and his CD of music by Rachmaninoff, Saint-Saëns, Richard Strauss, and Dvořák was voted the best Czech CD of 1999.

Program Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for violoncello solo were composed at a time when his creative focus was directed almost exclusively toward the composition of instrumental music. Between 1717 and 1723 he served as kapellmeister and director of chamber music at the court of Duke Leopold of Anhalt-Coethen, an informed music lover. The duke was a follower of Calvinist ideology and therefore demanded no sacred vocal music from Bach, whose skill as a composer of cantatas and motets was already well developed. The duke did, however, provide his court composer with an orchestra of highly skilled instrumentalists, who were the stimulus for Bach's remarkable works for solo violin and cello as well as numerous concerti for solo instruments and orchestra.

The cello suites belong to a tradition that began in the late 1600s, when the first works for unaccompanied cello were composed by Domenico Gabrielli and Domenico Galli, both cellists in the Cappella di San Petronio in Bologna. Bach's solo suites are the first such works composed by a non-cellist, but they reveal a deep appreciation on the composer's part for the technical and expressive potential of the instrument. A fine violinist in his own right, Bach was also aware of some of the "trade secrets" of the string players' world. He called upon the performers to activate more than one string at once, arpeggiate large chords, and continue melodic lines across numerous rests. The resulting multiple linear strands made possible the presentation of fugues, canons, and other forms of contrapuntal imitation on an instrument with only four strings.

The year 1915, in which Zoltán Kodály composed his only solo sonata for the cello, was a difficult and often tragic one for every European, and the composer was no exception. He had joined a voluntary militia with the mission of defending the monuments of Budapest, which committed him to many long and uncomfortable outdoor vigils, but he was still expected to fulfill his teaching duties at the Budapest Music Academy. To make matters worse, none of his works had been published since 1910.

In spite of the discouraging circumstances, Kodály poured himself into the process of creating this sonata, producing one of the most challenging works in the cello solo repertoire. It calls for an extended range of pitches, from the B below the bass staff to the B five ledger lines above the treble staff, left-hand *pizzicatti*, and unusual bowings. The player has to tune the two lowest strings of the cello one-half step lower than is common (*scordatura* tuning), which means that alternative fingerings are required. The work is of monumental length (thirty-three minutes) and requires prolonged periods of sustained intensity. Kodály draws heavily on Hungarian folk music for the sonata, as he did in most of his works. The folk element is most noticeably present in the third movement, in which the steady rhythm of a vigorous dance is constantly interrupted by passages of motivic growth and mysterious development.

Program notes by Stephen Ackert

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Mailing address
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

www.nga.gov